

*The Popish Doctrine of Merit and Ju-
stification considered.*

A
S E R M O N
P R E A C H E D A T
S A L T E R S - H A L L,

MARCH 20, 1734-5.

By *JOHN NEWMAN.*



L O N D O N :

Printed for R. FORD, at the *Angel*; and R. HETT, at
the *Bible and Crown*; both in the *Poultry*.

M D C C X X V.

[Price Six-pence.]



Printed for S. Low, at the Ash, and M. H. B. at the
and E. H. and C. at the Ash; and M. H. B. at the

London: 1851.

Price six pence.



R O M. iv. 4.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.



THAT part of the subject against Popery which falls to my lot in this exercise, is to state and confute the doctrine of the *Romish* church concerning the merit of good works, and the nature of a sinner's justification before God; or the way and method in which he may find favour and acceptance with him. The words I have now read will lay a sufficient foundation for the following discourse, if you consider how they stand connected with the context. *St. Paul*, the great apostle of the Gentiles, instances in the example of *Abraham*, the father of the faithful, that eminent pattern of faith and trust in God, that he was *justified by faith, and not by works*; for if he had been justified by works, *he had had whereof to glory, but not before God*: but the scripture saith, *Abraham believed God,*

and it was counted to him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

This doctrine is of a more evangelical and practical nature than some that have gone before, in which your eternal salvation is nearly concerned. It's no trifling or indifferent matter, or mere speculation which has no influence upon practice, on what you build your hope of eternal life, whether on the merits of *Christ*, or your *own* merits in conjunction with his. If men were well acquainted with the holy scriptures, had but a just veneration for them, and did but pay a due regard to their plain declarations, one would think that a few such passages as this in my text, might be sufficient to convince any unprejudiced person what the scripture doctrine is, and so determine the controversy between us and the Papists. But seeing they are conscious the Bible is against them, no wonder they keep it out of sight as much as possible, and will not trust the common people with the free use of it. However, since they acknowledge it to be in part their rule of faith, and we own it to be our only and intire rule, we must form our notions of every doctrine of faith according to that revelation. Whatever becomes of their unwritten tradition, we are sure * *all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable*

* 2 Tim. iii. 16. Isa. viii. 20.

fitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

I shall begin with considering the Popish doctrine concerning the merit of good works, and observe the following method.

First, I shall lay down some things for the stating of it, to prevent mistakes. *Secondly*, Prove that to be the doctrine of their church which I shall charge them with. *Thirdly*, I shall shew that there can be nothing meritorious in the sight of God in the best works of good men : and, *Lastly*, hint at the evil tendency, and mischievous consequences of the contrary doctrine, which is a just prejudice against it.

I. *First*, I shall lay down some things for stating the doctrine. And *First*, We must distinguish between such works as are done *before justification and grace*, and those which are performed *afterwards*; and between what they call a *merit of congruity*, and a *merit of condignity*. By the former, they mean such works as deserve a reward, not indeed out of any obligation arising from justice, but out of a principle of fitness, and the free bounty of God. By the latter, they mean such works as do in and of themselves, and in point of strict justice, deserve the reward. This higher kind of merit they
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only ascribe to the good works of justified persons, who have had a principle of grace communicated to them. As for those works done before grace, some of their schoolmen assert that a merit of congruity belongs to them, or that they deserve to be rewarded with pardon, and supernatural grace. But this is strange kind of doctrine, and argues gross ignorance both of the *condition* of human nature, in its present fal'n state, and the *extent* of gospel grace. The scripture represents men in their natural state as *dead in trespasses and sins, alienated from the life of God. The carnal mind is enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. They that are in the flesh cannot please God.* We need preventing grace to enable us to perform every thing that is morally good. Whatever is done without it partakes of the nature of sin, and is so far displeasing to him, instead of meriting any thing from him. Besides, they seem equally ignorant of the *riches* and *extent* of gospel grace. God is always ready to assist our weak and honest endeavours. He does not require that we should set about any duty in our own strength, unassisted by his grace, and he will not be wanting to those who are not wanting to themselves. But if sinners think themselves sufficient for every duty, without an humble dependance on divine grace, they discover so much pride and ignorance, that instead of securing the
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divine favour and acceptance, they will expose themselves to his highest resentment. I shall not insist longer upon this, because the council of *Trent* denies that there is any merit of congruity in this kind of works. Some have wondered at the reason of it, because this sort of merit is as much asserted by some of those school-men who were favoured by them as the other of condignity, and there is as much reason why they should allow the one as the other. The learned Dr. *Allix* does, as I think, assign the true cause of this, *viz.* that there is not so much to be got by the former as the latter. If works done before grace could merit grace, then the power of conferring it would not belong to the sacrament of penance and their other sacraments, which the priests only have the administration of; and for a well known reason they are willing to keep the power in their own hand, that the people may have a slavish dependance on them. But it's otherwise with their doctrine of the merit of condignity. They cannot renounce this without overthrowing the foundation of indulgences, and so justifying the Reformation begun by *Luther*. By this means the Popes and Monks would lose their credit, and the intire revenue of their indulgences. This was a sufficient reason why that mercenary church should make a difference between the one kind and the other.

I observe

I observe *Secondly*, That those works, which many of them lay the greatest stress on, and place the greatest merit in, are not *truly good*. They usually consist in penances and pilgrimages, in paying for masses, in endowing churches and monasteries, in saying so many *Ave-Maries*, and in paying their devotions to saints and angels before images and relicks, with the like trumpery. How little do they ever insist on the weightier matters of the law and gospel, on justice, faith, and the love of God, on the duties of spiritual mortification and self-denial? They will sooner forgive the commission of the grossest sins and the neglect of the most substantial moral duties, than the omissions of their own superstitions. These things are at best but will-worship, the fancies and contrivances of crafty and covetous men, which have no foundation either in reason or scripture. They are so far from being meritorious in the sight of God, that it's difficult to conceive how any who have an high value for such things, and who place a great confidence in them, can be in a justified state. Tho' they who abound in this kind of works may merit much of priests and Jesuits, it argues gross ignorance of God's nature and moral perfections, to think that they can be of any account with him. He may justly say to such, *Who has required this at your hands? Bring no more such vain oblations,*
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they are an offence and an abomination to me.

I acknowledge *Thirdly*, That some of the Popish writers do not carry the doctrine of merit *so high* as others do. They write with greater decency and modesty; their notions, at least in words, are less assuming and shocking: But then these are usually such as have wrote in Protestant countries, or in such where there has been a great mixture of Protestants with Papists, or when they have been forced to betake themselves to colour and art in answering those that have wrote against them, or when the blessed design of making new converts has been set on foot. Then they have made as artful a representation of their doctrine as possible, that it might look like the doctrine of Protestants, that so the unwary reader might be the more easily deceived and imposed on. But whatever seeming modesty and moderation there may be in these representations, and however they may come forth approved and recommended by great names, when they have had a turn to serve; I cannot think there has been much sincerity in them; especially when they have been published as the doctrine of their church, and not as their own private sentiments. My reason is this; when the same moderate notions have been preached and published by others of less note, who could not so well

serve the interest of mother church, they have been censured and condemned for them, and suspected of heresy, and if they had lived where Popery had been triumphant, would have been in danger of the Inquisition.

I fear many of these writers *speake lies in hypocrisy*, and come to weak and ignorant men *with all the deceivableness of unrighteousness*. This at least we may safely say without breach of charity, that we must not judge of the doctrine of the Romish church by the private opinions of a few of their doctors, but by the decrees of their Popes and Councils, and by the Catechisms which are taught among them with publick approbation.

But least any should think that we Protestants are enemies to good works, I shall in the fourth place suggest, what we hold concerning their nature and necessity. We readily own works truly good have an *intrinsic excellency* in them, and are highly pleasing and acceptable to God : Such as the duties of piety and devotion, justice and charity, temperance and sobriety. When they flow from a principle of faith in Christ, of love to God and duty, and are animated with the hope of the divine favour and acceptance, they are such sacrifices with which he is well pleased. They are instances of obedience to his command, and are
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our conformity to him in the moral perfections of his nature. They are profitable to our selves and others, and an ornament to our holy profession, and have a tendency to excite others, at the sight of them, to glorify our heavenly Father.

We also assert the *absolute necessity* of good works to our eternal salvation, both by the constitution of God, and in the reason of things, as they are a necessary qualification for our future blessedness. *Christ will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on them who know not God, and obey not the gospel. He will be the author of eternal salvation only to those that obey him. To them who by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. They who do his commandments have a right to the tree of life. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Faith without works is dead, and can neither justify us here, nor save us hereafter.*

We also hold that good works are of a *rewardable nature*, and shall be rewarded with eternal life. God as the wise and gracious governor of the world has been pleased to annex the sanction of rewards and punishments to his holy laws. He promises to reward the obedient, and threatens to punish the disobedient, and we may safely depend upon his fidelity to these his promises and threatnings. You read of *the reward of the inheritance.*

*inheritance.** The kingdom of heaven is given to *children*, therefore it's an *inheritance*; but it is given to *obedient children* as a *reward*. The apostle tells us, that *every one shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.* † We may say to good men as he does to the believing *Hebrews.* ‡ *God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which you have shewed to his name.* Our Saviour, as the *righteous judge*, will give the *crown of righteousness* to those who have *fought the good fight*, who have *finished their course*, and *kept the faith*. It is the wisdom, holiness, and goodness of God, and not strict justice, that has settled the connection between the precept and the promise, the duty and the reward.

The same holds true concerning the *proportion* as well as the *quality* of the reward. There will be different degrees of reward as well as of punishment. *As one star differs from another star in glory*, so it will be at the *resurrection of the just*. *They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.* || *As a man sows so shall he also reap: He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly.* God in his infinite wisdom has seen fit to make such a connection as this; tho' the lowest degree

* Col. iii. 24.

‡ Heb. vi. 10.

† 1 Cor. iii. 8.

|| Dan. xii. 3.

degree of heavenly glory will be vastly more than a recompense for the best services, and the greatest sufferings of the present life; which shews that all is of grace, and not of merit; unless by *merit* we mean no more, than that it became the wisdom and holiness of God to make and fulfil such promises, and to settle such a connection between our duty and our reward; and then this will be chiefly a dispute about words. However, seeing the word merit has so proud a sound in the mouth of a sinful creature, and has been and still is abused to serve very bad purposes, it is highly fit that it should be intirely dropt, and no pretences made to it.

Fifthly, That which we deny in this controversy is this: That the good works of the best of men do in their *own nature* and in point of *strict justice* deserve those rewards God has promised to them. We thankfully acknowledge that he will reward grace already received, and improved, with farther degrees of grace here, and with eternal life hereafter. *To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.* All this is of grace and not of debt; for there seems a contradiction in the very terms, to assert, as they do, that one degree of grace should merit another, since grace and merit are utterly inconsistent.

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II. We come *Secondly* to prove, that the doctrine of the *merit* of *condignity* is the doctrine of the Romish church. The council of *Trent* (which was confirmed by the Pope, and is generally received as the standard of *modern Popery*,) asserts, * *That the good works of a justified person are not so the gifts of God, that they are not also the merits of the justified person; and that he being justified by the good works performed by him through the grace of God and merits of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does truly merit increase of grace, and eternal life; and denounces an Anathema against those who hold the contrary.* Here seems a strange mixture of truth and error, and a plain inconsistency in this their determination. † A learned prelate observes, that they speak so uncertainly of this point, as evidently shews they either knew not themselves what they would establish, or were unwilling others should know it: To serve some purposes they might have in view, they left these things in great darkness and confusion. But we may more easily judge of their sense by their after-writers, who were the great champions of the *Roman* cause, and who are not afraid to speak more plainly. Dr. *Alix* tells us, that *Vega*, who wrote his books of justification during the time he was at the

* Concil. Trid. Sess. 6. Can. 32.

† Archbishop *Wake*.

the council, maintains, that the council by truly meriting did understand meriting *de condigno*; and the doctors of the *Inquisition* did most evidently declare as much, when they expunged out of several books of their church such propositions as heretical, which denied the merit of good works. Let me give you an instance of this, which has been taken notice of by several * learned men: In the *Index Expurgatorius*, which was set out according to the order of the council, in the year 1584, the two following questions and answers, taken out of a publick office of their church, are ordered to be expunged.

Quest. Dost thou believe that thou shalt come to heaven, not by thy own merits, but by the virtue and merits of Christ's passion?

Answ. I do believe it.

Quest. Dost thou believe that Christ died for our salvation, and that none can be saved by their own merits, or any other way, but by the merits of his passion?

Answ. I do believe it.

How could these men, who pretend to believe the scriptures, without shame and blushing reject such questions and answers, as favouring of heretical pravity? No wonder they contend for another rule of faith besides the scripture, by which to judge of heresy;

* *Usher, Stillingfleet.*

heresy ; or else faith in Christ, and his merits as the only Saviour, which is one of the most clear and fundamental doctrines of the gospel, could never bear such a representation.

Maldonate the Jesuit also asserts, that we do as truly and properly, when we do well through God's grace, merit rewards, as we do deserve punishment when without this grace we do ill. If there be an inconsistency in these words, and one part contradict another, let the Jesuit be answerable for it. Another of their authors, *Andredius*, speaks to the same purpose, that eternal blessedness is no less due to the good works of good men, than eternal torments are to the evil works of wicked men ; and that eternal life is so the recompense of good works, that it is not so much given of God freely, and out of liberality, as it is out of debt ; and that the nature of merit and grace not being consistent, the reward is to be reckoned not of grace but of debt †. The famous cardinal *Bellarmino* expressly asserts, that our good works do merit *ex condigno* eternal life, and not only by reason of God's covenant, but also by reason of the work itself. ‡ I shall mention but one more who goes yet farther. *Vasquez*, thinking that *Bellarmino* had attributed too little to good works, is not ashamed to assert, that those of just persons are of themselves without any covenant,
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† See Mr. *Clarkson's* Morn. Exer. p. 407.

‡ *Bellar. de Just. Lib. 5. cap. 17.*

or acceptation, worthy of the reward of eternal life, and have an equal value of condignity to the obtaining of eternal glory, and that there comes no accession of dignity to their works by the merits or person of Christ - - - and that tho' God's promise is annexed to the works of just men, yet it belongs no way to the merit of them, but cometh rather to the works themselves, which are not only worthy, but meritorious. From whence he draws this remarkable conclusion : *Seeing the works of just men do merit eternal life as an equal recompense and reward, there is no need that any other condign merit, such as that of Christ's, should interpose, to the end that eternal life may be rendered to them :* with more such vile stuff, that I shall not stay to transcribe or repeat. * Now if this were not the doctrine of the *Roman church*, we may well say, as the formentioned prelate does, we are a little surprized that no *Index Expurgatorius*, no authentick censure has ever taken notice of so dangerous a prevarication ; but contrariwise these are the great authors of their party, approved, embraced, and almost adored by the greatest and most learned of that communion.

But besides this plain language of their most eminent writers, it is farther evident, that the doctrine of proper merit must be the doctrine of their church, since several of

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* See *Waker's* Expof. Doct. C. E. pag. 22.

their other acknowledged doctrines do suppose, and are founded upon this. If no works are properly meritorious, then there can be no pretence for *works of supererogation*, nor for those pardons and indulgences which are given forth upon that supposition; and so the poor wretches will be cheated both of their pardon and money too, and by trusting to so broken a reed, will I fear be left to bear the punishment of their own sins. It's well known that the Papists pretend some of their saints have been, and are so very good, that they have merit more than sufficient for their own salvation; they have such a surplussage of it, as is a rich treasure laid up in the church, under the Pope's lock and key, which he gives forth, and transfers to others who can well pay for it. He is for engrossing the power of every thing, by which he can turn the penny, and make merchandise of the souls of men. But there is not the least foundation in scripture or reason for this kind of works, or the least hint how the merit of them can be transferred from one to another, or how the power of this comes to be lodged in the Pope's hand. They were the *foolish* virgins that desired the *wise* to give them of their oil, but *these* were too wise to part with any, lest they should not have enough for themselves and them. Our Saviour has taught us when we have done all to say:

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We are unprofitable servants, and have done nothing but what was our duty to do. Since then some of the gainful parts of Popery are founded on this doctrine of merit as well as that of purgatory, it is sufficiently evident, however some may mince the matter, that this is an avowed doctrine of their church.

I may further mention in proof of this, the matter of their private and publick devotions. How often do they join the merits of saints with those of our blessed Saviour, and plead the one as much as the other, as if they were upon a level? Nay, if we may judge by the frequency of their devotions to the *Virgin Mary*, one would conjecture that they had a greater dependance on the Mother, than on the Son himself. - - - - If any should ask from whom did this proud doctrine take its rise, I answer, that tho' some of the fathers did use this word *merit*, yet not in the sense of the Popish writers. They mean no more by it, than we do by the rewardableness of good works, or that it's God's appointed way of obtaining eternal life: Or if any of them should mean more than this, they are not our rule of faith, we submit to no human authority, nor regard the sentiments of men any further than they are agreeable to the unerring word of God. A learned divine, *Dr. Clarkson*, thinks that the pedigree of this darling doctrine may be easily derived from the Pharisaical *Jews*,

from whom he says they have received a great part of their religion. The *Pharisees* were for infallibility, and of a magisterial imposing spirit in matters of conscience, before the Popes were born.

As for the doctrine of merit, *Camero* cites a passage out of *Maimonides*, where he says, *that every man hath his sins, and every man his merits, and he that hath more merits than sins, is a just man; but he that hath more sins than merits is a wicked man.* And that learned author is of opinion that St. *James* had an eye to this error of the *Pharisees*, when he tells us, that * *Whosoever offends against the law in one point is guilty of all.*

Notwithstanding all that I have said to prove that this doctrine of merit, since the council of *Trent*, is the established doctrine of the church of *Rome*, yet I deny not, but there are several persons in the visible communion of that church, who have juster thoughts of God and themselves, and more modesty and humility than to pretend to any merit in the sight of God. † Dr. *Allix* has fully proved that from the eleventh century to the beginning of the sixteenth, this was not the generally received doctrine of their church. Some of their Popes and canonised saints have spoken against it in as free terms, as we Protestants could do. What can I say to all this, but that if the corruptions of this

* James ii. 10.

† See his Discourse of Merit.

this church grow worse and worse; if they lead men into gross mistakes in matters of the last importance; then the entering into, and continuing in her communion, must be more and more unsafe and dangerous. Let us not *partake with her in her sins and heresies, least we partake with her in her threatened plagues and judgments.* This change in her doctrine in one century from what it was in another, is a plain evidence how little just pretence she has to infallibility. If any shall ask how it came so far to prevail, as at last to be established by the council of *Trent*, the author I just mentioned gives us this account of it: *Thomas Aquinas*, who lived in the middle of the thirteenth century, was one of the first who broached the doctrine of the merit of condignity. He maintains, that *because of the operation and grace of the Holy Spirit, wrought in the faithful, from whence good works do proceed, their good works do merit ex condigno.* This, as the Dr. observes, is so very weak a foundation, that one might naturally draw from it a doctrine directly contrary to it; for if our works proceed from the grace of the Holy Spirit, we can merit nothing by them, the glory being due to him, and not to us. Notwithstanding this weak foundation, this man came afterwards to be advanced into the calendar of their saints, and his writings to be admired and adhered to
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by some of the orders of the church of *Rome*; and some that were great sticklers for him, got possessed of the *Inquisition*, and then they soon made use of this cruel and tyrannical power to crush all that contended with them in matters of religion. This being the case, what wonder this error did soon prevail, when the terrors of that hellish tribunal did threaten all that durst oppose it; especially when you consider that much about the same time the Monks got the power of hearing confessions, and directing the consciences of men, maugre all the opposition of the secular priests; they being in the interest of *Thomas Aquinas*, and designing to advance the merits, and so the wealth of their convents, took occasion, when in the *tribunal of penance*, to infuse this notion of merit into the minds of those who came to confession. By this means it spread in the *Roman* church, and as it laid the foundation for their gainful doctrines of indulgences and pardons, and they began to taste the sweetness of them, we can't wonder that the council of *Trent* established it, and anathematized all who should oppose it.

But whatever authority this doctrine may derive from that council, I come in the *Third* place to confute it, by shewing there is no ground for it in revelation or reason.

First,

First, It is directly contrary to the plain and exprefs *declarations* of *scripture*. How often are we told that *we are saved by grace, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.** And that *not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saves us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.†* When the apostle speaks of eternal life, as opposed to death, the change of the expression is very remarkable. *The wages of sin is death,‡* but *eternal life is the gift of God through our Lord Jesus Christ*: and again, *Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.¶* If our salvation be of grace, it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace; and if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work.** The best of men in scripture are represented as disclaiming all pretence to merit, when they have to do with an holy and righteous God. *Nebemiah* was an excellent governor, and did many things for the honour of God and the good of his church; yet he begs that God would spare him according to the greatness of his mercy.†† So *David* was an holy and devout prince, but yet he acknowledges, that if God should be strict to mark iniquity, he could not stand before him; and
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* Eph. ii. 8.

† Tit. iii. 5.

‡ Rom. vi. 23.

¶ Rom. v. 21.

** Rom. xi. 6.

†† Neh. xiii. 22.

solaces himself in this thought, that *there is forgiveness with God that he may be feared.** St. Paul after his conversion was probably one of the best men that ever lived, and yet he speaks of himself as the *least of all saints*, and owns that it was *by the grace of God he was what he was*. When he laboured more abundantly than the rest of the apostles, it was *not he, but the grace of God that was with him.*† The better men are, the more humble apprehensions they have of themselves; they are usually much in penitential confessions of sins, and earnest supplications for mercy: they are *looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*, and often begging that they may find mercy for themselves and others, in a dying day, and in the judgment day.

I am not insensible that the *Romanists* sometimes bring scripture to support their doctrine of merit: But we may be as sure their interpretation cannot be the true sense, as we are that one place of scripture does not contradict another. Is eternal life sometimes called a *reward*? at another time it is called the *gift* of God, and therefore must be a reward of grace. Is it stiled a *crown of righteousness*, that is owing to the purchase of Christ, and to God's faithfulness to his promise, which is one branch of his justice or righteousness? But then it was grace that
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* Psal. cxxx. 3, 4.

† 1 Cor. xv. 10.

made the promise of so great a reward. Again, When saints are said to *walk with Christ, for they are worthy*, this worthiness is an evangelical, and not a legal one. It only denotes their qualification and meetness for the promised blessedness, and not their desert of it. These and many such like expressions declare the wisdom and holiness, grace and goodness, bounty and liberality of our merciful God and father, and not the merit of those who are thus favoured by him.

This will be further evident by considering, *Secondly*, the reason of things. None of the conditions and qualifications of merit are found in the best works of good men. I would illustrate this matter under a few particulars. *First*, It seems impossible to me *that any creature*, how excellent and glorious soever, should *merit* any thing at God's hand in a way of *commutative justice*, and that, because he is a creature. There may be merit between one creature and another, but there can be none between the creator and his creatures. The angels and archangels, seraphims and cherubims received their being and all their excellencies from God, and on him they depend for the continuance of them: the greater these are, and the more glorious the works are, which they are capable of performing, the greater is their obligation, honour and happiness.

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They are indebted to him, and not he to them. They may be assured indeed from his wisdom, goodness and faithfulness, that he will never put a period to their being and blessedness, but where would be the injustice if he did? He would only recal what at first he freely gave, and was at liberty to continue a longer or shorter time, as it pleased him. These holy and excellent creatures are the most humble ones, and are represented in scripture in the lowest postures of adoration, as vailing their faces before God's throne, and casting their crowns down at his feet, ascribing blessing and honour and glory to his perfections, and not to their own merits. Now if these noble creatures, that have never sinned, have no pretences to merit, much less can such mean and sinful creatures as we are. For,

Secondly, We are so far from meriting, that we cannot *satisfy* divine justice for our past and daily offences. We are sinners both by nature and practice; in many things we often offend, and are taught by our blessed Saviour to pray for continual pardon. Now pardon and merit seem inconsistent. If our present and future obedience could be perfect and spotless, this would be no more than our indispensable duty; and could be no satisfaction to justice for sin; for the not running farther into debt is no payment of our old ones. How then can insolvent debtors pretend

tend to merit? Nay, suppose our good works could be a satisfaction, it can be no meritorious act only to pay our just debts: But this is not the case with us. For,

Thirdly, There are *sinful defects* cleaving to our best duties, which will not bear the strict eye and inspection of God's impartial justice. There is that iniquity in our holy things, for which God might condemn us, if he should enter into judgment with us. Were it not for Christ's perfect atonement, and prevalent intercession, there would be no hope of audience and acceptance. They are grossly ignorant of themselves, who reckon that their best works come up to the purity, spirituality, and extent of God's righteous law, for that reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart, to the principles and ends as well as the matter of our actions. Who dare say, that he loves the Lord his God with all his heart, soul and strength, or that he ever performed one religious duty without any vain thought mixing with it? How numerous are the defects of our best graces and duties? All pretences to sinless perfection are the effects of pride and ignorance. *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* We have not yet felt the power of gospel truth: *that* is the religion of sinners, and supposes us from first to last to be imperfect creatures. Integrity or uprightness of heart and life is the best

perfection we can attain to; and it is our happiness that we are under such a dispensation of grace, as accepts of sincerity instead of legal perfection, as the term of life. Now since our best works cannot justify themselves at the bar of God's justice, how can they justify us before him, or merit any thing at his hand.---Yet further,

The good that is done by us is not performed by our *own strength*, but by strength derived from above. The sinful defect of our works is from ourselves, but the goodness of them, by which they are pleasing to God, is from him. It's by his grace we are what we are, and do what we do. We need both preventing and assisting grace to enable us to do any thing that is spiritually good. *We have no sufficiency of our own, but all our sufficiency is of God. It is he that works in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.* We are also said to be *his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.* Now if we have *nothing but what we have received*, how unreasonable is it to boast as *if we had not received it?* Our adversaries themselves don't deny the assistance of grace: But how that which is the effect of another's grace can be meritorious, is hard to understand, especially how it can merit of him, from whom the grace itself was received. That by which we
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merit ought in all reason to be our own, and not another's.

I add to this, that our best works can no way be *profitable to God*. Tho' we may rob him of his just rights by with-holding that homage and obedience which is his due, and tho' he is pleased to accept our sincere but imperfect services, yet it's impossible to be *profitable to him*, as one man is *profitable to another*, and as he who is *wise is profitable to himself*. Is it any pleasure to the almighty that thou art righteous, or is it any gain to him that thou makest thy way perfect? * If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him, or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him, or what receiveth he at thy hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man. Tho' our goodness may extend to our fellow creatures, to the saints that are in the earth, it cannot extend to God. His blessedness is so perfect and unchangeable, that it's not capable of any addition or diminution. Now in all proper merit, there is in some sense an exchange of benefit. Benefits are given for benefits received. There is a vast difference between the obedience and sufferings of our blessed Saviour, and our best services. Such
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* Job xxii. 2, 3. and xxxv. 6, 7, 8.

was the dignity of his person, that he both could and did make reparation for the injury done to the honour of God's law and government, and opened a way for the display of his glorious perfections in our recovery and salvation. He therefore may be said truly to merit, tho' we cannot; for his sufferings were a valuable consideration for the blessings bestowed upon us. But such is our meanness and poverty, and his all-sufficiency and fulness, that proper merit can have no place on our part, in any of our transactions with him.

Once more, There is no *proportion* between our best works, and the rewards he has promised, either in point of *excellency* or *duration*. This there ought to be, if the former in strict justice did deserve the latter. How mean and poor are our best services! We work like ourselves, like weak and imperfect creatures, but the great God rewards like himself, as a free and noble benefactor, becoming the largeness of his bounty and liberality. Do we believe the gospel promises concerning the greatness and excellency of the heavenly glory, that it exceeds all present thought and expression, for *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter into the heart of man, what God hath prepared for them that love him?* Are we to behold his face in righteousness and to be satisfied

fied with his likeness upon us; to be in his presence, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore? And can we be so stupidly proud and ignorant as to think our sorry services are a valuable consideration for all this glory? How few are our good works, and of how short a continuance? If we began never so soon, and continued never so long, and suffered never so much in the service of God, all this would take in but the compass of a few years, whereas the promised reward is eternal and unchangeable. We are called by the God of all grace unto his eternal glory by Jesus Christ, and are begotten again to the lively hope of an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. What can be more evident than that neither the services nor sufferings of the present life are worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed.

Let me now in the *Fourth* place suggest a few of the pernicious consequences that attend the doctrine of merit, and are a just prejudice against it.

First, This tends to puff up the minds of carnal sinners with *spiritual pride*. Tho' our adversaries own in words the influence of grace, yet if we can so improve this grace, as to merit eternal life at the hand of God,

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this thought will naturally elate the spirit, and gives ground for boasting, which in our fal'n state we are very subject to. We are poor and proud, too apt to think we are something, when we are nothing. Tho' pride was never made for apostate man, yet there are sad remains of it in all of us.

How prone are ignorant sinners to trust to and depend on themselves, how gladly would they be their own saviour and happiness, and not be obliged to look out for something to recommend them to the divine favour and acceptance? The religion of Popery is too much the dictate of corrupt nature in all unrenewed men; but it's a temper abhorred of God, directly opposite to the true spirit of the gospel and the stated method of our recovery and salvation. Man fell by pride, and the first right step towards his restoration must be in deep humiliation and poverty of spirit; for *God resists the proud*. The poor Publican that smote upon his breast, saying, *God be merciful to me a sinner*, was justified before the proud Pharisee, that *thanked God he was not as other men*.

Secondly, This doctrine *derogates* from the *merits of Jesus Christ*. Tho' the Papists do not render them wholly useless and superfluous, yet as some of them represent the matter, they were only necessary to procure the first grace for us; for after that, they tell

us we may merit for ourselves both increase of grace here, and eternal life hereafter. And is not this to set aside Christ and his merits, as of little use in the Christian life? Whereas we ought from first to last, *to live by the faith of the Son of God*, a life of constant dependance on his satisfaction and mediation. To say, as some of them do, that Christ merited that we might merit, or that by his merits our good works become meritorious, is a notion to me altogether strange and unintelligible. I can easily apprehend how it may be consistent with the perfections of God's nature and government, to accept the weak and imperfect services of such imperfect creatures as we are, for the sake of Christ's perfect righteousness and atonement (and indeed I don't see how it would be becoming a righteous and holy God to accept of any thing but what was either perfect in itself, or for the sake of that which is so.) But how Christ's merits, which are without us, can make any intrinsic alteration in the works that are done by us, so that with them our works are meritorious, and without them are not, is what I cannot understand. They are intrinsically the same, whether we consider his merits or not. He merited for us, and is willing we should have the benefit of it; but it was never his design to make us our own Saviour; we ought to abhor every doctrine that derogates

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gates from the honour of our blessed Redeemer, and would set us upon a level with him.

Thirdly, This has a tendency to *mislead men*, in matters of the greatest moment and importance; for of that nature are the concerns of our eternal salvation. I fear those who conceit they have any meritorious works of their own, and trust in them, will be found to build upon the sand, and will meet with a fatal disappointment. It's true our adversaries own, that these works must be the effect of justifying grace; but I greatly question whether any who have felt the power of divine grace, or know the grace of God in truth, can believe their works are of a meritorious nature; for true grace humbles the soul, and lays it low in the sight of God. It's evident, as I have already hinted, that the works they lay the greatest stress on, are of little account with him; they are at best but the dead form and image of religion. How dangerous must it be for men to build their hope upon such a foundation to the neglect of Christ, serious, vital and practical religion!

Fourthly, This notion *casts a damp upon*, and destroys the hope of the most humble and serious Christians: They have that deep sense of their own imperfection, weakness and unworthiness, that if they were to have no more grace here or glory hereafter than what they could

could merit at the hand of God, they would soon lie down in sorrow and despair. Sometimes the number and aggravation of their sins are impressed with that weight upon their minds, that they find it difficult to believe there is grace enough in God, and merit enough in Christ to pardon and save them. However while they look upon eternal life as the gift of God and purchase of Christ, there are happy seasons when they entertain a lively prospect of it; but if it were to be their own purchase, they know so much against themselves, as would cut off all hope and expectation.

I shall only add, that the doctrine of merit *prepares the way*, and lays a foundation for several other Popish doctrines, which are of a pernicious nature; such as works of supererogation, pardons, and indulgences, and the like. If we can't merit for ourselves, much less can we merit for others, by doing more than is necessary for our own salvation. What then will become of the stock of merit in the treasury of the church, which, as you have heard, the Pope gives out upon several occasions to those who have no merit of their own, and can pay for it? Tho' the loss of these doctrines would be a manifest prejudice to his Holiness, and the whole army of Monks and Friars that have a dependance on him, yet I believe it will be no real detriment to the souls of men.

It's more than time that I should subjoin a few things upon the other part of my subject, concerning the nature of a sinner's justification before God. This is a doctrine of great importance in the Christian religion, which was very much darkened, and obscured, and perverted by the Papists before the Reformation. Their doctrine of human satisfaction and penances had a tendency either to distress the consciences of awakened sinners, or to lay them asleep by dangerous opiates, instead of leading them to the blood of Christ, the only healing balsam for a wounded spirit. After what I have already said of their doctrine of merit, I need not be large here ; for if no works of ours, internal or external, are perfect and meritorious, they can never be the ground of our justification before God. The Papists seem to me to confound sanctification with justification. Tho' they mention the righteousness of Christ, and the remission of sins as necessary ingredients in our justification, yet they make our own inherent righteousness and good works as necessary a part of it, which seems to set them upon a level with Christ's righteousness and God's pardoning mercy. The council of Trent defines justification to be *not only remission of sins, but the sanctification and renovation of the inner man, and makes the only formal cause of our justification to be that righteousness of God by*
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*which he makes us righteous, and by which we are renewed in the spirit of our mind.**

This council, which is much more free in enforcing her decrees and canons with a solemn curse than with solid reason, pronounces an anathema against any who shall say that *men are justified either by the alone imputation of Christ's righteousness, or only by the remission of sins, excluding grace and charity, which is diffused in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and inheres in them; or that the grace by which we are justified is only the favour of God.* This at best is a very perplex and confused account of this important matter, and is apt to lead the ignorant and injudicious into dangerous mistakes.

I am unwilling needlessly to multiply verbal disputes, and therefore freely acknowledge that the word we translate *justify* may signify *to make one just*, and in some few places of scripture may admit this sense: but it's more commonly taken in a *forensic* and judicial sense, and not in a *moral* one: to be justified is to be accounted and treated as a righteous person, and not to be made inherently so. It's opposed to condemnation, and includes in it pardon of sin, and a right to life.---We also own the *necessity* of sanctification as well as justification. We need the spirit of Christ to renew our natures, as well as his blood to expiate our guilt,

* Con. Trid. Sess. 6. cap. 7. can. 11.

guilt. *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Only the pure in heart shall see God. The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* The heavenly inheritance belongs only to those who are *sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus*. It is the *inheritance of the saints in light*. We also affirm that justification and sanctification are two invaluable blessings that always go together. None are justified but at the same time they are sanctified. *Christ is made of God to them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.* We read of being *washed, justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God*. If we speak only of *initial* sanctification, it's the same thing for substance with faith and repentance, regeneration and conversion, and is antecedently necessary to our pardon and acceptance. But if by it we mean *progressive* mortification and holiness, our dying more and more to sin and living unto righteousness, then it's consequent on our justification, and is the best evidence of our being in a justified state.

Notwithstanding these concessions, we still assert that the scriptures speak of justification and sanctification as *two* very distinct and different privileges of the covenant of grace. The one removes the guilt of sin, and so our obligation to punishment; the other, as far as it prevails, removes the power and

and pollution of it : tho' it be imperfect at first, it is or should be of a progressive nature. The one is God's gracious act towards us, the other is his good work in us. The one causes a change in relation to God and his righteous law, the other a real change in the temper and disposition of the soul. In order to set this matter in a little more clear and distinct light, I shall suggest the following things.

First, To justify is the act of God as our righteous governor and judge, and not as he is the author of inherent grace. Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifies. It is the same God that justifies the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith. None but that God, against whom sin is most immediately committed, can remit the penalty of his own violated law. He claims this as his prerogative. I, even I am he who blotteth out thy transgressions for my own name sake. He promises to be merciful to our unrighteousness, and our sins and iniquities to remember no more. His perfections are frequently celebrated and adored upon this account. Who is a God like unto thee, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin ? It's he that in the gospel covenant has settled the terms of forgiveness, or the way and method of finding acceptance with him ; and when*

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* Rom. viii. 33.

we sincerely comply with these, he by the same gospel, as his instrument, constitutes and pronounces us to be in a justified state. He treats us as such persons now, and will declare us such by the sentence of our final judge in the great day. The gospel is the rule of judgment. Those who are absolved or condemned by it now, shall be absolved or condemned by Christ in that awful day. In vain are we justified by our selves or others, if he condemn us; for *he that judges us is the Lord*, and there is no appeal from that Tribunal.

Secondly, The only meritorious cause of our justification is the perfect righteousness and atonement of Christ. *He trod the wine-press of his father's wrath alone, and of the people there was none with him.* He is a compleat Saviour, nothing must be joined with him in point of satisfaction and merit: he will not endure to have any thing in the creature set in competition or co-ordination with him. If he may not be our only Saviour, he will be no Saviour to us. How clear, full, and numerous are the scripture declarations upon this head? *As by the disobedience of one many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many are made righteous. As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon*

upon all men to justification of life.* We are said to be justified through the redemption that is in Christ, and to have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin, and to be justified by his blood. God having set him forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood, declares his righteousness for the remission of sins, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.† He is made of God to us righteousness, as well as sanctification, and is the Lord our righteousness, in whom we have both righteousness and strength. He who knew no sin, was made sin, or a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.‡ It was the sin and ruin of the Jews, that being ignorant of the righteousness of God, or of this way of justification appointed by God, they went about to establish a righteousness of their own, not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God. || It's evident the gospel justification is not that of innocent creatures, for we can't deny the charge of guilt that is brought against us. We are all sinners before God. Nor are we justified by a mere act of arbitrary grace, for the promises of forgiveness are founded upon a foregoing satisfaction made to the justice of God for sin by the sufferings and death of

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* Rom. v. 18, 19.

† Rom. iii. 24, 25. Eph. i. 7. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 21.

|| Rom. x. 3.

Christ. Hence his blood is stiled * *the blood of the everlasting covenant*, and *all the promises are in him, yea and amen to the glory of God.*† Christ's righteousness and atonement must be pleaded by those who are interested in it, in bar to their condemnation, and as their right and title to pardon and favour. *Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather is risen again. He was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification, and now there is no condemnation to them that are in him.* This leads me to add,

Thirdly, Faith in Christ is the appointed means of obtaining an interest in his atonement, and so is the condition of our actual justification. The ground and foundation of this glorious privilege, and the way and means of interest in it, are two very different things. The former must be attributed to Christ's righteousness, and to that alone; the latter to a vital and operative faith. The atonement in this way must be received before we can joy in God, as our reconciled God. *They who believe not are condemned already,‡ and the wrath of God abides upon them.* We frequently read of *being justified by faith*, and of *the righteousness of God by faith*, and of *faith being imputed to us for righteousness*. Christ was offered up a propitiatory

* Heb. xiii. 20.

† 2 Col. i. 20.

‡ Rom. v. 1. iv. 22.

pitiatory atoning sacrifice on the cross for sin, in our room and stead. This sacrifice has been accepted of the Father on our behalf. Upon our sincere compliance with the terms of the gospel, we are interested in it, and receive saving advantage by it. It's by faith that awakened convinced sinners flee for refuge to the hope set before them.

The faith that justifies is neither a dead notion in the head, nor a groundless confidence and persuasion that our sins are pardoned, and we are in a justified state: But it's a cordial acceptance of Christ in all his offices, and a resignation to him as Lord Redeemer. It's a *faith that works by love, that purifies the heart, is our victory over the world, and is productive of gospel obedience.* St. Paul* and St. James do not really contradict each other, when the one says, *Abraham was justified by faith, and not by works,* and the other that *he was justified by works and not by faith only.*† Paul does not speak of the same kind of works that James does, nor James of the same kind of faith that Paul does. St. James's works are such as flow from a vital principle of faith, but St. Paul's are the works of the law, such as were done without faith, and such as were trusted to as meritorious in the sight of God, and so substituted in the room of Christ and his righteousness. In like manner

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* Rom. iv. 2, 3.

† James ii. 24.

the faith St. *James* speaks of is only a dead notion, whereas that of St. *Paul's* is a vital principle, productive of gospel holiness and obedience. But neither our faith or best works have any part in that which belongs to the Redeemer's office, much less must any pretended human satisfactions and merit, mix with his merit and atonement.

From this account of justifying faith, we see how unsafe and dangerous the Popish doctrine of sacramental justification must be. Bishop *Burnet* in his exposition of the thirty-nine Articles takes notice how very lax their notions in this respect are. His words are these : *That the use of the sacraments, if men do not put a bar to them, and if they have only imperfect acts of sorrow accompanying them, does so far compleat those weak acts as to justify us.* This he justly reckons among the most mischievous of all their practical errors, as it tends to enervate all religion, and to make the sacraments of the nature of a charm, which if they can be come at, tho' with ever so slight a preparation, will make up all defects. Thus those ordinances that were given us to raise and heighten our repentance and faith, are substituted in the room of them, and become engines to encourage sloth and impenitency. — I shall only add,

Fourthly, That the *ultimate design* of God in our justification, is, the displaying and magnifying

magnifying the *freeness* and *riches* of his own *grace*. Hence we read of being *justified by his grace*, and that *we have redemption through his blood, according to the riches of his grace*; and that it is *of faith*, that it might be *by grace*. The whole contrivance is admirably adapted to advance this divine perfection. It was *grace* that did admit of a substitute in our room and stead, for God might in strict justice have insisted upon our suffering the punishment of sin in our own persons. It's *grace* that has provided and accepted the ransom for us, that has constituted the new covenant, and settled the connection between sincere repentance and faith on the one hand, and pardon and justification on the other; and it's *grace* that enables us to comply with the reasonable terms proposed; so that the *grace* of God is as free and rich as is consistent with the other perfections of his nature and government. If we were to be justified by our own works, and these were perfect and meritorious, we should have wherewith to glory in ourselves; whereas God will have no flesh to glory in his sight and presence, but *he that glorieth must glory in the Lord*. In Christ alone shall *all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory*. Thus have I given you a summary account of what I take to be the substance of the Protestant doctrine of justification; and as far as it differs from the

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the Popish doctrine, we have clearly the language of scripture on our side. This account does most effectually advance the honour of divine grace, and of the Redeemer's merit, and is most for the relief and comfort of awakened convinced sinners. - - - I shall assist your improvement of this subject in a few words of advice, and so conclude.

Be very *thankful* for the *Reformation* from Popery, and that you live in those times and places where it prevails. When serious and inquisitive Christians were allowed the free use of the scriptures, they soon got much clearer light into this, and several other important doctrines, than they ever had before. *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Take heed lest being led away by the error of the wicked, you fall from your own steadfastness. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* The more you know of him, and of his infinite fulness and merit, the more you will abhor the principles of Popery, which are a vile usurpation of his rights, honour, and dignity.

Let Protestants make it evident, that they are as much *friends to good works* as the Papists can be, and do as much abound in them. Tho' we dare not trust to them as
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the meritorious cause of our pardon and acceptance here, and of eternal life hereafter, yet they are the best evidences of our present pardon, and the qualifications of our final blessedness. Where the love of God and man doth really rule in the heart, it will make men more truly charitable and beneficent, than any proud conceit of merit can do. Let not the professors of a false religion outdo you in works of substantial piety and goodness. *Let the rich in this world be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, feed the hungry, cloath the naked,* and in this way cause their light to shine before men. It will be our shame and reproach, if any should be under a temptation to exchange the Protestant religion for Popery, as the more kind and compassionate religion of the two. But then,

When you have done your best, own yourselves to be *unprofitable servants*. Fly to the blood of Christ, and the mercy of God in him, for pardon and acceptance. That you may never be tempted to place an undue confidence in any of your own duties, endeavour to be better acquainted with God and yourselves. Study more the purity and extent of his righteous law. Frequently compare your hearts and lives with it. Bring yourselves often before the bar of your own conscience ; if that condemn you, how will
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you bear God's enlightened tribunal? Keep death and judgment much in your view: In the serious thought and approach of that awful day, you will be convinced you need something better than your own merits to trust to and depend on. *Bellarmino* himself could say, that it was *safest*, considering our manifold defects, to trust to Christ's righteousness. Now that which is safest to die by, must be the safest to live by. He may justly reject those at death, who neglect him in the time of life. Whatever others may say or do, let us all abide by this, as an undoubted truth, that *it is grace which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord*. To whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. *Amen.*

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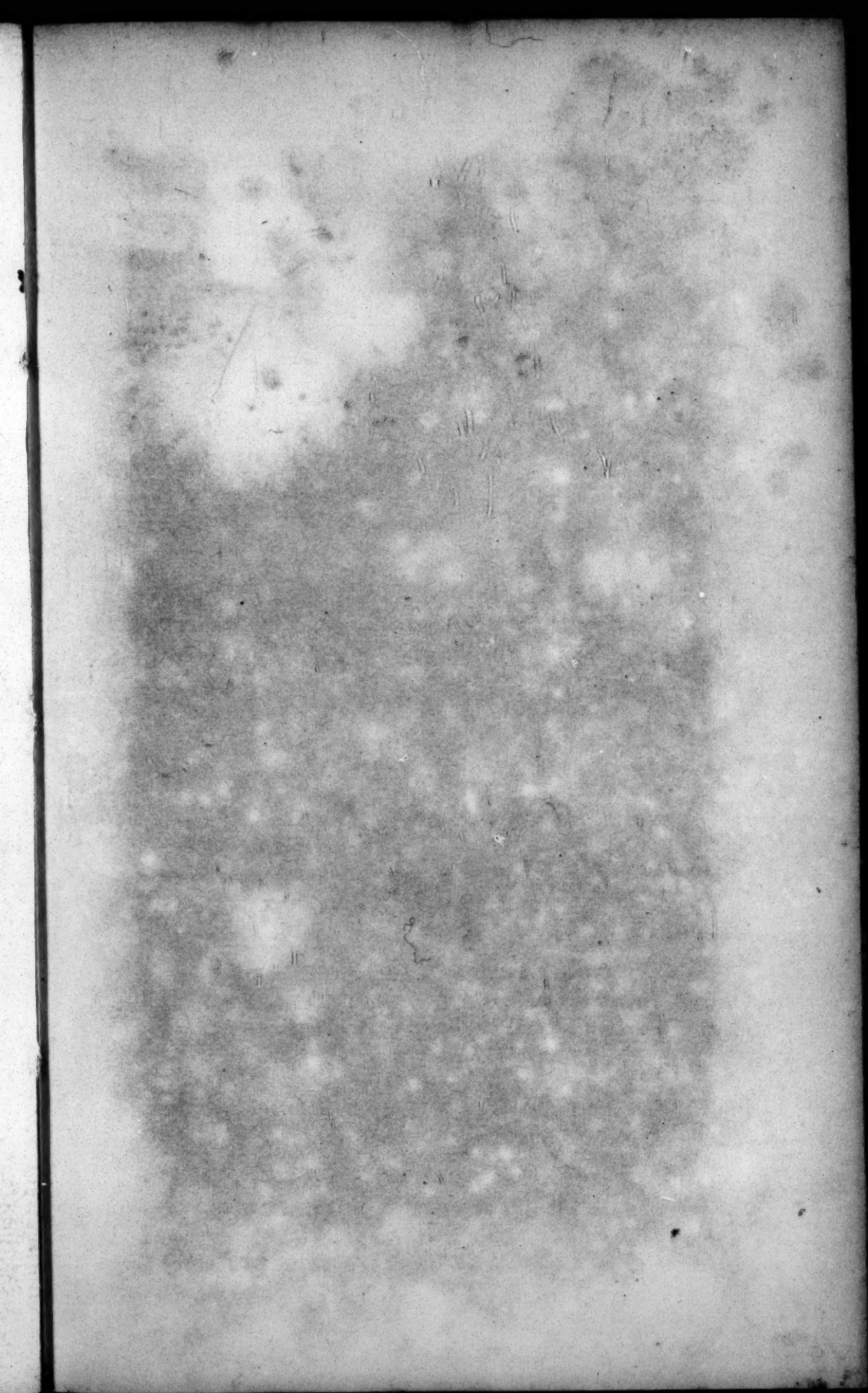
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